

ASPECT IN BUNGI: EXPANDED PROGRESSIVES AND *BE* PERFECTS

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1. Introduction

Bungi is a little studied English dialect of the Canadian prairies that developed along the fur trade routes running south of Hudson Bay. In this paper I focus on two non-standard features of Bungi: an expanded use of progressive constructions and the use of *be* instead of *have* in perfect constructions. The paper is in three main parts. The first section provides background to the Bungi dialect, giving the history, a description of the resources available, an outline of the distinctive dialect features of Bungi, and a brief discussion of features that Bungi shares with other English vernaculars. The next two sections are devoted to the expanded progressive constructions and the *be* perfects respectively. The origins for each of these constructions is discussed as possibly deriving from one of three sources: relic features of earlier varieties of English; traits carried into Bungi from Scottish English or Gaelic; or a result of universal processes of language change that can be found in other English vernaculars. The paper concludes with a discussion of the interaction of the processes that led to these non-standard features in Bungi.

2. Background of Bungi

2.1 History of the Bungi Dialect

Bungi developed from the interaction of the English spoken by the employees of the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) with the native languages, primarily Cree, spoken by the aboriginal women whom they married. The HBC recruited primarily in the Orkney Islands and the Highlands of Scotland, and therefore most of the employees spoke a dialect of Scottish English. The Hudson Bay Company had a presence on Hudson Bay from the early 1700's and by the early nineteenth century children of "mixed blood" were very numerous (Stobie 1968:70). Throughout the nineteenth century HBC workers and their families retired to the Red River Settlement (present day Winnipeg), and this community became the centre of the Bungi dialect. There was continuous contact between Bungi and Scottish English: the Red River Settlement itself was established by immigrants from Scotland in 1811, and the HBC continued to hire from Scotland well into the twentieth century. The apogee of Bungi appears to have been in the late nineteenth century; by 1980 only a few elderly speakers remained (Blain 1992).

2.2 Resources Available

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The materials for the study of Bungi are very limited, but sufficient to extract the main features of the dialect. The stories told by Francis J. Walters are a valuable resource; an excerpt is provided in Appendix A. Walters was born in 1898 in England, but moved to the Red River Settlement as a child, in 1904, where he became a fluent speaker of Bungi. As an adult he worked as a storyteller, writing and performing stories in Bungi dialect of the lives of the Red River farmers in the late nineteenth century. These stories are available variously on tape (Walters Collection), collected in a text (Walters 1993) and in phonetic transcription (Blain 1992). One other story has been published in Bungi dialect, 'The Shtory of Little Red Ridin Hood' (Scott and Mulligan 1951); a brief excerpt can be found in Appendix B. Portions of interviews with three elderly speakers are provided in Blain's thesis (1992); there are also tapes and transcriptions of speakers with some Bungi traits collected by Stobie in 1965 (University of Manitoba Archives: Stobie Collection). A few further examples of unattributed dialogue can be found in published articles (Scott and Mulligan 1951; Stobie 1968, 1971).

2.3 Dialect Features

Since Bungi is not widely known, I include below a short discussion of its main features. Section 2.3.1 lists some of the more distinctive features of Bungi; Section 2.3.2 lists features in Bungi that are frequently found in other English vernaculars.

2.3.1 Distinctive Dialect Features

The following five characteristics have been noted as salient Bungi features in earlier research (Scott 1951; Stobie 1968, 1971; Blain 1992).

- (a) Lack of contrast between [ʃ] and [s], resulting in *sot* for 'shot', *sewer* for 'sure', *sall* for 'shall' and *shtory* for 'story'.
- (b) Non-standard vocabulary: occasional use of Cree or Scots words such as the Scots *slock* 'extinguish, snuff' or the Cree *apichekwani* 'upside down'.
- (c) No distinction between masculine and feminine third person singular pronouns, leading to usages like *My daughter he is coming*.
- (d) Distinctive rhythm and stress patterns: Stobie notes that both syllables of bi-syllabic words are stressed equally, as in *ca-noe*, and that "the most distinctive characteristic is ... the "lilting cadence" (Stobie 1968:74). This lilt is evident in several of Stobie's 1965 taped interviews (Margaret R. Stobie Bungi Dialect Collection).
- (e) Repetition of both noun and pronoun as in *My daughter he is coming* or *I'm just slocked it the light*.

2.3.2 Shared English Dialect Features/Vernacular Universals

Chambers (2003, 2004) discusses the phenomenon of vernacular universals, features shared widely by English dialects that have not necessarily had similar contact patterns or origins. Five of the universals listed by Chambers are attested in Bungi (Gold to appear) and are listed below.

- (a) The pronunciation of final unstressed *-ing* as *-in*: *marnin, feedin, settin, thinkin*.
- (b) Simplification of final consonant clusters: *fers', siken'* (second), *an'*.
- (c) Non-concord of subject and verb. This can be seen both in the use of *is* or *was* for plural subjects, as in *Times is changed my girl*; and in the use of the suffix *-s* with non-3rd singular subjects, as in *I sez, we talks, we keeps*.
- (d) Devoicing of final stops: *wickit wolf, dock 'dog'*.
- (e) Multiple negation, as in *Nobody can't sleep no more* and *But I never said nothing but*.

3. Progressive Constructions

3.1 Extended Progressives in Bungi

Progressive constructions are used more frequently, and in more contexts, in Bungi than in standard English. Such non-standard uses are illustrated in the examples below, where the progressive is used to express stative meaning (1), habitual action (2), or a simple past event (3) - (6). Examples (1) - (3) are from Blain (1992:182, 186); examples (4) - (6) from 'The Sthory of Little Red Ridin Hood' (Scott an Mulligan 1951: 44, 45).

- (1) *I'm not wanting a shabby looking purse, my dear*
- (2) *We'd be covering up with wool coats*
- (3) *The old man's been passin away* (passed away)
- (4) *Little Red Ridin Hood's bin thinking* (thought) *it's a good idea*
- (5) *sees bin fallin asleep* (fell asleep)
- (6) *the owld wife's bin dzuympin out* (jumped out)

3.2 Extended Progressives in other English Dialects

An extended use of progressive constructions has been noted in English vernaculars around the world, including: Ottawa Valley English, AAVE (Blain 1992); the Englishes of India, Singapore, Papua New Guinea, West Africa, East

Africa, and the Philippines (Platt, Weber & Ho 1984); South African Indian English (Mesthrie 1992) and Scots English (McColl Millar 2007). The sentences in (7) and (8) below show non-standard use of the progressive in Scottish English and Black South African English similar to that found in Bungi. Example (7) from Scottish English (Gachelin 1997:34) illustrates the progressive used to express a present stative meaning, similar to example (1) from Bungi above. In example (8) from Black South African English (Wade 1997) the progressive is used to express a simple past event, which can be compared to the Bungi examples (3) – (6).

- (7) *I am wanting to be present*
I'm needing a cup of tea
- (8) *I was laughing that time when she was saying it*
 (I laughed when she said it)

3.3 Possible Origins of the Bungi Extended Progressive

3.3.1 Relic Forms of Earlier English

The formation of the Bungi dialect began in the eighteenth century, and it is therefore possible that non-standard features in Bungi result from the retention of features of earlier forms of English. Lamont (2005) claims that the progressive was frequently used for habitual meanings in Early Modern English, and provides the example in (9).

- (9) *She is always seeing Apparitions and hearing Death-Watches*

Lamont further argues that progressive constructions were used where standard English uses simple tenses until the early twentieth century. The sentence in (10), which was written by Keats in 1819 (Lamont 2005), illustrates the use of the progressive where contemporary English would use the simple past tense to express the stative meaning.

- (10) *What I should have lent you ... was belonging to poor Tom*

3.3.2 Language Contact: Scottish English/Gaelic influence

The extended progressives in Bungi might have been a result of the retention of similar usage in the Scottish English spoken by the HBC employees. Some of these men spoke Scottish English as their first language; others, the Highlanders, spoke Gaelic as their first language. An extended use of the progressive construction has widely been attributed to the influence of the Gaelic periphrastic present, particularly in discussions of Scottish English (Blain 1992; Görlach 1998; Filppula, Klemola and Paulasta to appear). In Scottish English the progressive form is commonly used for stative verbs, in particular with verbs

expressing a mental activity such as *doubt, forget, hear, mind, think, want* (McColl Millar 2007, Purves 2002), and this extended use was particularly prevalent in Highland speech (Purves 2002). The use of the progressive for the verb *want* as in (1) could reflect the carry over into Bungi of a Scottish English feature.

3.3.3 Universal Tendency

As discussed in Section 2.3.2 above, Bungi shares many traits with English vernaculars worldwide. It has been argued that these vernacular universals arise because of universal language tendencies rather than from language contact or shift (Chambers 2003, 2004; Gold to appear). Extended progressive constructions are so widespread in languages of the world, that they may well result from some yet undefined universal language tendency. The Bungi data cannot be fully explained on the basis of Scottish English influence alone, as Bungi progressives are found with a much wider range of verbs, including such non-stative verbs as *pass away, fall asleep* and *jump* (see examples (3), (5), (6)). Gachelin (1997) attributes an expanded use of the progressive to a prominence in many languages of aspect over tense, and suggests that this may account for the extended use of progressives in so many English dialects around the world.

4. Perfect Constructions with *be*

The following description of Bungi *be* perfects is divided into two parts: in Section 4.1 below I discuss constructions formed from the auxiliary *be* and the past participle *got*; in Section 4.2 I give examples of the auxiliary *be* with other past participles. It should be noted that without live informants it is impossible to distinguish *be* from *have* in the contracted form of the 3rd person singular, as they are both pronounced [z] or [s] and written as *s*. For this reason, the examples in (11) (Scott and Mulligan 1951:45) could represent either auxiliary.

- (11) *the dahrs bin flying open*
he's bin so greedy

I found only one unambiguous *have* auxiliary, shown in (12) (Scott and Mulligan 1951:44). This is a present perfect progressive construction; like the progressive constructions illustrated in examples (3) to (6) above, it is used here to express a simple past meaning, not the perfect and continuous meaning it would have in standard English.

- (12) *Red Riding Hood's mother has been putting (put) a bannock*

4.1 *be got*

Expressions of the form *be got* are by far the most frequent and salient of the Bungi *be* perfects. *Be got* is found in all persons, in almost all samples of Bungi

speech including stories and informant interviews, and in both positive and negative constructions, as illustrated in examples (13)–(15) (Scott and Mulligan 1951:43) and in (16) – (18) (Blain 1992: 177, 190).

- (13) *I'm got to get back hom, I'm got Jane Mary's bodice on*
- (14) *I'm got the horse tied upset the Hotel*
- (15) *I'm not got that big money*
- (16) *What if they're not got no dolly?*
- (17) *You're not got your fine boyish figure*
- (18) *We're not got no time but*

4.2 *be* + past participle

Other than *got*, two past participles that are unambiguously found with the auxiliary *be* are *been* and *sloked* 'extinguish, snuff'. The auxiliary *be* followed by *sloked* is shown in (19) (Scott and Mulligan 1951:43); *be* plus the past participle *been* is found both in the present perfect (20) (Blain 1992:177) and the present perfect progressive (21) (Scott and Mulligan 1951:44).

- (19) *Awe Willie, I'm just sloked it the light*
- (20) *they're not been up to get any*
- (21) *I'm been taking some lunce to my owld grandmother*

4.3 Possible Origins of Perfect Constructions with *be*

4.3.1 Relic Forms of Earlier English

Perfect constructions with the auxiliary *be* were very common in the eighteenth and nineteenth English (Rydén and Brorström 1987), as were the progressive constructions discussed in Section 3.3.1. However it should be noted that this use of *be* with perfects was a characteristic of intransitive constructions only. Rydén and Brorström calculate that 80% of intransitive perfects used the auxiliary *be* in 1700; this decreased to 60% by 1800 and less than 50% by 1900. They provide many examples with the verb *get*; two from the eighteenth century are shown in (22).

- (22) *I am now got as far as my Mare will carry me. (1703)*
They are got married. (1734)

The *be* perfects of eighteenth and nineteenth century English cannot fully account for the Bungi data since the Bungi examples include, in addition to a few intransitive verbs, many transitive verbs, as evident in examples (14)–(19) above. Not only did Rydén and Brorström include no examples of transitive verbs, there were no examples with the past participle *been* as in the Bungi examples (20) and (21).

4.3.2 Language Contact: Orkney English

As noted in Section 3.3.2 above, extended progressives are a common characteristic of Scottish English and these likely had a direct influence on the development of the Bungi progressives. In contrast, the use of the auxiliary *be* in perfect constructions is not a characteristic of Scottish English in general. However it has been noted as a feature of Orkney and Shetland Island English, as illustrated in the two following quotes:

“The auxiliary verb ‘to be’ is used in places where English has ‘to have’, instead of ‘I have written’ ‘I’m written’ would be used.” (Kay 2006:196)

“Perhaps the most striking structural feature of Shetlandic is the use of *be* as an auxiliary verb in active perfective constructions with all types of verbs.” (McColl Millar. 2007:75)

The Hudson Bay Company frequently hired employees from the Orkneys, as noted in the following quotes (Lange 2007:54):

"The Company boats often called at Stromness in Orkney before setting off for Canada"

"today the Company serves as a shorthand to Orcadians for people who left Orkney during this time (the 18th and 19th centuries) "

Blain (1992) suggests Orkney English as a source for the Bungi *be got* perfects and gives the examples in (23) to illustrate the use of the auxiliary *be* with *got* in letters written by Orkneymen in Canada in the 1820's (Blain 1992: 190).

- (23) *I am got two geldron 'children'*
I am got not noues to inform you of

Note that unlike the examples from early modern English in (22), the sentences in (23) show *be got* used in transitive constructions, as is commonly found in Bungi.

4.3.3 Universal Tendency: Paradigm Levelling

Unlike the extended progressive constructions, the use of *be* as an auxiliary for perfect constructions is not found widely in English vernaculars. Thus this particular construction would not be a good candidate for consideration as a vernacular universal. However the expanded use of *be* as an auxiliary can be considered a result of the language internal pressure of paradigm leveling, a process found universally in language change. Further, it is possible that there is a link between the two Bungi phenomena, that the increased use of

progressives led to internal language pressure to prefer *be* as the auxiliary in compound tenses.

The extended use of the progressive construction in Bungi would have resulted in the very frequent use of *be* as an auxiliary, since it always accompanies progressive constructions. The perfect construction is attested much less frequently, so that the incidence of *have* as an auxiliary would have been much less frequent than the incidence of *be*. This could have created an ideal situation for paradigm leveling, where the auxiliary *be* came to be seen as the only auxiliary used in periphrastic verbal constructions. Reanalysis of the 3rd person contracted form *-s* in perfect constructions as representing *is* could have further contributed to this internal language change. Standard English can be considered to have leveled in the opposite direction over the past several centuries, from both *have* and *be* perfects to *have* alone. As noted in Section 4.3.1 above, the use of *be* as an auxiliary in intransitive perfects had been very common, but fell precipitously over the past 300 years. In modern English these two auxiliaries have come to be associated with aspectual differences: *be* used for the imperfective aspect with progressive constructions, and *have* with perfective aspect with perfect constructions. It appears that Bungi does not associate aspect with the auxiliary per se: *be* is used both for a perfective meaning, as in (19) and for imperfective, as in (1).

5. Discussion

Three sources have been discussed as possible origins for the two non-standard verbal constructions in Bungi: earlier varieties of standard English; influence from other languages or dialects (Scottish English, Orkney English, Gaelic); and universal language processes. None of these factors on its own can account completely for the distinctive Bungi constructions. It must therefore be concluded that multiple factors have contributed to the development of these Bungi constructions.

Bungi began its development in the eighteenth century and could have retained features of standard English of that time that have not been retained in contemporary standard English. I have shown that both the expanded progressive and *be* perfects are found in earlier English varieties and this factor must therefore be considered relevant to an analysis of the Bungi constructions. Secondly, Bungi speakers were primarily of Scottish descent, with many of the first speakers originating in the Orkney Islands or the Scottish Highlands. It is therefore likely that common Scots vernacular features or specific Orkney or Highland features could have been carried over into Bungi. I have shown that *be* perfects have been noted as a trait of Orkney English and expanded progressives characteristic of Scottish English in general and of Highland speech in particular. The expanded progressives in Scots vernacular are widely attributed to Gaelic influence; there could have been further influence of Gaelic on Bungi in Canada since many of the Hudson Bay Company employees from

the Highlands had Gaelic as their first language and continued to use it in Canada. There is evidence that Gaelic was in use in Red River area into the twentieth century (Stobie 1968:74). Therefore, this factor of language contact is essential in understanding the origin of these Bungi constructions.

The third and final consideration is universal language tendencies. It was shown above that expanded progressives are found in English vernaculars around the world; this suggests some universal tendency that leads to a preference for progressive constructions. The universal process of paradigm leveling must be considered in any account for the Bungi *be* perfects as well.

I conclude then that none of these factors is sufficient alone to account for the Bungi facts, but that all three have contributed to the development of these Bungi constructions. Other scholars have suggested that multiple factors must be considered in analyzing language change. With respect to expanded progressives, Filppula, Klemola and Paulasta (to appear) have argued that the expanded progressives in regional British dialects arise both from vernacular universals and from Celtic influence.

6. Conclusion

The Bungi dialect provides fascinating data concerning the nature of language change. The creation of Bungi brought together eighteenth century English, dialects from different parts of Scotland and influences from Native Canadian languages, primarily Cree. In this paper I have argued that multiple factors must be considered in tracing the source of nonstandard dialect features of Bungi – features of standard English of earlier centuries, features of dialects from different parts of Scotland, and universal language tendencies. I claim that all of these factors have contributed to the non-standard Bungi extended progressives and *be* perfects. The influence of the Native Canadian substrata has not been considered for these two constructions and offers an interesting path for future research.

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Appendix A

Excerpts from 'This is What I'm Thinkin' by Francis J. Walters (my rendering of phonetic transcription in Blain 1992: 228-245)

It's kinda darty out this marnin, so after feedin hup at the stable, I was settin along the stove havin a warm and dunin mi siken plate of bustin* and thick cream. It's a little on the barnt side, I thought. I hope see has better luck with 'er nets batch an' not to barn it so muts.

This is what I'm thinkin -- when all ass once there comes a knock on the dur, so I sez to the Missus, "see who's that." An' this is my neighbour, Jamesie, now, so I sez to him, "Come, sit in, there's lots of tea." But right away 'e sez to me, "I'm

got no time, b'y. I'm got a sick horse an' I can't get him op, b'y." That's 'at 'e said when he said that to me. So I sez to him, "Hol' on now. I'll git on me hat an' coat an' come along with yuh an' take a looksee."

Now all this is in the late springtime, you'll see. The wind's a-whistlin an' fairly blowin us offen our feet and nigh on takin our brith away out of us. Now we're up to our knees in gutter in places and it's tough goin -- but we keeps to the lee of the bush as best we kun but, till we comes to the gully leadin op to Jamesie's place and aboot op'sit aunt, ol' Aunt Jennock's. An then, as we're passin, see calls out to me to call along on my way back and take a fres bannock for me an' the Missus -- made with hard grease. B'y, that's 'at's gud along with nipi* jam.

 Now 'e comes polin across now an' when 'e gits close, I see this is ol' Buru. "Where'd ya git that ol' tub?" I sez to 'im. "I expected it t' turn apichekwani* an' ya go chimuck* into the water." He only sez, "Daa," but, an 'e hol's up the back of 'is hand to me and nods 'is head. Well, 'at's a habit 'e's got to say 'e's too smart with a boat for a thing like that to happen. Well, we talks for a little 'boot the catfis 'e's bin catchin lately, -- then 'e puts me straight on the news aroun'. Seems like old Jicup's (Jacob's) siken' dorer's been thinkin on gittin married, 'e sez. 'is fers' doter's man not can git 'head so good since 'is coo died. "Too bad to lose a good animal like that," I sez. "Well, 'iz siken' dorer's makin a better match, but," 'e sez. "oredi 'er man has a cow, an' a sack of flour, an' a house. An' even, he's got a winda in 'is upstairs.

* *apichekwani* - upside down

* *bustin* - cracked wheat roasted and cooked as porridge

* *chimuck* - the splashing sound made when something is dropped in the water.

* *nipi* – jam made from high bush cranberries

APPENDIX B

Excerpt from 'The Shtory of Little Red Ridin Hood' told by D.A. Mulligan
 (Scott and Mulligan, 1951)

Little Red Ridin Hood's bin thinkin it's a good idea and shtarted *pickin* flowers. After see'd pickt enough flowers see sat down for a minit and sees bin fallin asleep. While sees asleep that wickit wolf's bin shneakin off to the owld *wife's* place. He noaked on the dahr and the owld grandmother sais, "Who's that noakin at the dahr?", and the wickit owld wolf saiz, "It's me, little Red Ridin Hood," so the owld wife saiz, "Pull the shtring and wack een. (italics in the original)